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SUBJECT: 17TH HORN OF AFRICA CLIMATE OUTLOOK FORUM

#### Summary

1. The 17th Greater Horn of Africa (GHA) climate outlook forum (COF) took place in Nairobi March 1-3, organized by the USAID-supported Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Climate Prediction and Applications Center (ICPAC). The forum brought together policy makers, technical experts and climate outlook users from ten GHA countries to develop a forecast for the March to May 2006 rainfall season and to review its implications.
2. The consensus climate forecast is for an increased likelihood of normal to below-normal rainfall over much of the GHA during the March to May 2006 rainy season.
3. If the region does experience below normal rainfall, there will be a significant negative impact on regional drought conditions, and reduce the likelihood for recovery. In turn, donors providing humanitarian assistance to affected populations, including the USG, will need to review assistance strategies and levels. End Summary.

#### Background

4. The USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) Nairobi-based information technology specialist attended the 17th COF organized by ICPAC in Nairobi March 1-3. The forum is organized twice per year by GHA governments and ICPAC to formulate consensus climate forecasts for the GHA.
5. The mission of ICPAC is to provide timely climate information and prediction services and enhanced applications of such products to reduce climate and weather related risks to food security, water resources and health for sustainable development in the GHA region. In addition to hosting the COFs, ICPAC works with member countries to strengthen the capacity of climate scientists and users in climate prediction and applications. The International Research Institute for Climate Prediction at Columbia University (IRI) has been providing technical assistance to ICPAC through a USAID/OFDA grant to improve climate forecasting in the GHA region.
6. In 2005, ICPAC officially became a technical agency of IGAD, and it plans to begin providing technical assistance to other offices within the IGAD secretariat on issues related to climate and weather

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forecasting.

#### The Forum

7. The 17th COF was organized jointly by ICPAC, the national meteorological and hydrological services of the ten GHA countries, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and IRI.
8. Participants included climate scientists and experts from national, regional and international institutions including the Drought Monitoring Center in Zimbabwe, the United States Geological Survey, the Famine Early Warning System, University of Nairobi, UN Food and Agriculture Organization, UN World Food Program, Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS), the Regional Center for Mapping of Resources for Development, IRI, the WMO, Kenya Power and Lightning Company (KPLC) and

media organizations.

19. The theme of the forum was "applications of seasonal climate prediction products and services in coping with climate related risks in the GHA". Discussions were held on the state of the global climate system and its implications on the seasonal climate of the GHA. Among the principal factors taken into account were the observed and predicted surface sea temperatures (SSTs) in the tropical Pacific Ocean and in the tropical Atlantic and Indian oceans.

#### The Forecast

10. The three categories used for the forecast are above-normal, normal, and below-normal rainfall, with those definitions based on observed rainfall averages over a thirty year period. "Climatology" refers to a situation where any of the three categories has an equal chance of occurring. "Above-normal" rainfall is defined as within the wettest third of recorded rainfall amounts in each area, "normal" is defined as the third of the recorded rainfall amounts centered around the climatological median, and "below-normal" rainfall as within the driest third of recorded rainfall amounts.

11. The climate experts' consensus forecast is as follows:

-- Burundi: an increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall;

-- Djibouti: climatology with increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall in the south;

-- Eritrea: climatology in much of the country;

-- Ethiopia: climatology in the north, increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall in central parts of the country, and an increased likelihood of normal to below-normal rainfall in the south;

-- Kenya: an increased likelihood of normal to below-normal rainfall in much of the country, and an increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall in parts of the country including the Lake Victoria basin;

--Rwanda: an increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall;

-- Somalia: an increased likelihood of normal to below-normal rainfall in most of the country, with an increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall in the northwest and coastal areas;

-- Sudan: climatology in the north and an increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall in the south;

-- Tanzania: an increased likelihood of normal to below-normal rainfall in much of central and north-eastern parts of the country, and an increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall over the Lake Victoria basin and the south and southwest;

-- Uganda: an increased likelihood of normal to below-normal rainfall in central and south-eastern parts of the country and an increased likelihood of normal to above-normal rainfall in the Lake Victoria basin and the west.

#### Implications of the Forecast

12. The regional climate outlook is susceptible to spatial and temporal variations. However, it can assist decision makers in making appropriate plans to mitigate the adverse impacts of extreme climate events in many sectors, while taking advantage of good conditions to make potential improvements.

13. After developing the climate outlook, forum participants formed country teams to discuss its potential impacts and implications. The teams also prepared strategies for disseminating the climate outlook information to non-specialists, and made recommendations on how to use the forecast to reduce vulnerability in affected populations.

14. Areas projected for normal rainfall in the coming season may not receive enough rain to reverse the impacts of the accumulated rainfall deficits and drought conditions that have persisted over parts of

these areas.

15. Heavy and short duration rains and flash floods could occur, especially in arid and semi arid zones even during the seasons with below-normal rainfall conditions.

16. Areas with an above-normal rainfall forecast may experience a rise in river and reservoir water levels and increased soil moisture, leading to higher agricultural production, increased availability of pasture and water for livestock, and reduction in water-related conflict. However, above-normal rainfall may also lead to an increase in water-borne diseases, flooding, damage to crops and vegetation, destruction of infrastructure and disruption of transportation.

17. Areas receiving below-normal rainfall will experience a deepening of drought effects, including water shortages, need for relief food, migration of pastoralists in search of pasture and water and high demand for agricultural produce.

18. Most forecasters are predicting a transition from a mild La Nina to neutral conditions over the eastern and central equatorial Pacific ocean while the SSTs in much of the Atlantic ocean and south-western and eastern/equatorial Indian ocean are warmer than average. This, combined with the cooler than average temperature over north-western parts of the Indian ocean caused a tropical cyclone to develop in the southwestern Indian ocean producing heavy rainfall over some parts of the equatorial region during the forum (felt as heavy unseasonal rains in Nairobi). Further development of tropical cyclones in the western Indian ocean region during the March-May period could disrupt the rainfall patterns in the sub-region.

#### Conclusions

19. The COFs and the climate information and prediction products that result have enormously improved the quality of seasonal rainfall outlook in the GHA since their inception. As participation at the COFs has widened with different themes, the interaction of users from various sectors has improved the dissemination of climate information and prediction products for use in early warning and disaster management, preparedness and mitigation, and in planning for sustainable development in the GHA region.

20. The general forecast for lower than normal rains in much of the areas affected by the drought-induced food insecurity and livelihoods crisis in the region is cause for serious concern. Especially in Somalia, where it is difficult to deliver assistance, the current crisis could deteriorate into a catastrophe and famine if the rains fail.

21. Donors, including the USG, providing humanitarian and other assistance to mitigate the effects of the crisis and reduce long-term vulnerability may, therefore, need to find more resources to address a potential worsening of the already bad situation in the GHA region.

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